

Ways to Find Connections to People in Mainstream Community Life

Introduction

When people have only been part of paid disability related activities and groups it can be hard to know where to start to make new connections and get out and about with new people in your area. This Quick Guide has some ideas for making new friendships.

Finding an activity or shared interest is often the key to making new connections.

Let's make it happen

Connecting with others

Connecting with others in your community is an important part of belonging. Making new friends and contacts helps you feel good, and might help you find an activity you really enjoy, or even a job. Here are some ideas for ways you can connect with new people:

Volunteering

Volunteering your time is an excellent way to:

- meet people
- contribute to your community
- gain work experience and contacts to find work

You can volunteer in many places, including:

- community centres
- schools
- charitable organizations
- hospitals and retirement homes
- sporting organisations
- faith based groups

To find more information about volunteering, check out the Volunteering Australia web site at <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/> or ask your peers for some ideas.

Also see the Quick Guide on Volunteering

Community centres

Joining activities and programs at your local community centre is also a good way of meeting new people who share your interests. Most neighbourhoods have community centres that offer all kinds of activities and programs:

- health, fitness and recreation

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- child care
- education
- leisure
- many other areas

For a list of community centres, visit your local library, search online or call your local council.

Sports teams and sports centres

Playing sports is another good way to meet new people of all ages. In most cities and towns, there are organized leagues for all major sports at different skill and age levels. There are also sports centres where you can:

- enjoy fitness classes
- swim
- work out at the gym
- do many other sports-related activities

Joining associations or social clubs

There are many opportunities for people with common interests to gather. Examples include joining:

- neighbourhood groups
- culturally based groups
- book clubs
- game clubs
- music, arts or dance clubs

You can find out about associations and clubs in your area by searching online or the local newspaper, by calling or visiting your local community centre, library or Council. For more ideas, check out the Quick Guide: Ways to find opportunities in mainstream community.

Your neighbourhood

Perhaps simplest of all is meeting new people in your neighbourhood. Say 'Hi' to your neighbours, take them a cake, or some flowers. If you have children, you can also meet other parents at the local playground. Maybe you could help organise a street party, or a trade of fruit or flowers? Starting a little free library or food swap at the front of your house is a sure fire way to get locals dropping by too. (Here's some info about starting a Little Free Library: <https://littlefreelibrary.org/start/>)

Getting involved in your child's school

Most schools encourage parents to support their child's education by getting involved with the school or school board. There are many ways to help – from hearing children read in the mornings, covering books in the library, helping in the canteen, coaching or managing a sports team, or even just doing the occasional weeding. Getting involved can help your child do better at school as well as help you be part of a school community. Even if you don't have children at the school, many schools welcome help from new people.

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Places of worship

Many people enjoy a faith community, who might meet at:

- churches
- synagogues
- mosques
- temples
- other places of worship

Many of these communities run faith studies, community services, parents' groups, and opportunities to share and make music. Faith communities are generally very welcoming of people interested to learn more, and can be a great place to meet people and make friends.

Disability Specific Groups

Sometimes it's great to connect with others with disability and shared experiences. It can feel good to be with a community of people who 'get it'. Joining a disability advocacy group, or helping out at a disability specific organisation can be rewarding as well as be a great opportunity to meet new people.

Where you can find more information

For people with a disability, Angela Novak Amado, Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota made this great resource called "Friends: Connecting people with disabilities and community members", which you can download at:

http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/Friends_Connecting_people_with_disabilities_and_community_members.pdf

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